

Roman War-Making and Expansion in the Mid-Republic: A Re-evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Rome's seemingly unstoppable march towards empire during the mid-republican period was a world-altering event. The story of Rome rising from a small city-state to becoming the mistress of the Mediterranean has been told and interpreted countless times, but it is a story often concerned only with Rome and gives little agency to the many other peoples that shared this geographical and temporal space with Rome.

The narrative of events of the mid-republican period has been interpreted as evidence for Rome's bellicosity and also for her desperation for defending herself and her friends. Historians find in the ancient sources the evidence to support their theories regardless of whether they are advocating an aggressive or a defensive posture of Rome. Either side of this argument is monocausal and lacks a certain amount of interpretive awareness of the inherent complexities and nuances involved in such historical events.

This study is an attempt to acknowledge the complex nature of any set of events that lead to war, and this is particularly so in the environment of the ancient Mediterranean. Many factors induced Rome towards war and conquest; these included concerns for defence, economy, and status. The ruling class, collectively and as individuals, also sought glory and fame by excelling at war and the Roman political system was focused on men serving the state, and the ultimate service to the state was to be successful in war.

Pressures from the interstate environment of the ancient Mediterranean and the internal culture interacted synergistically to guide the decision makers in Rome to determine on war in some instances rather than any alternative. In this study the ancient sources will be revisited and analysed without any preconceived theory. The goal is to let the ancient sources tell the story with all the complexities that, by their very nature, matters of war had.

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